A

LETTER

OF THE

Bishop of Ely,

TO HIS

CLERGY.

LONDON,

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My Dear Brethren,

THAT the Viſitation, I ſhortly intend, may be more eaſie to my ſelf and more profitable to my Dioceſs; I have thought fit to deſire a few things of you before-hand.

I. It would be a good Preparation to the enquiries I am then to make, if you would call your ſelves to an account, how you have performed the ſeveral parts of the duty incumbent on you: and if you find you have been negligent, to reſolve upon and immediately begin, a ſincere reformation. I am not able to mention them all in a ſhort Letter; but the very firſt thing in the *Book of Common Prayer* deſerves to be ſeriouſly conſidered: where you are enjoyned *to ſay daily the Morning and Evening Prayer, either privately or openly*, &c. It is poſible I am ſure to obſerve one part of this Injunction, if you cannot obſerve the other. That is; if you cannot procure a Congregation to meet daily in the Church; yet you may, and therefore ought, to read the Service of the Church in your own Families, either *privately or openly, not being hindred by Sickneſs, or ſome other urgent cauſe*; which cannot happen every day. This, if ſolemnly performed, would be a powerful means, to preſerve an awful ſenſe of God continually upon your Minds, and to make *your ſelves and your Families wholſome Examples to the*

Rubrick 2. 3. after the Preface concerning the Service of the Church.

flock of Christ; as you promiſed to endeavour at your *Ordination*.

Read over the Vowes you then made, and the Charge which was then given you: and examine your ſelves faithfully how you have obſerved them. Which would ſave me the labour, either of mentioning all other particulars of your duty here, or making long exhortations to you, when I meet you at the viſitation: All being compriſed in the Promiſes you made at that time; if they be diſtinctly pondered.

If I had therefore but one Requeſt to make to you, it ſhould be this; that every Morning, the firſt thing you do, you would call to mind, that you are the Miniſters of Jeſus Chriſt; who have made ſuch and ſuch promiſes to him, when you were admitted into his Service: which if you grant me, it could not fail to have a great effect upon your hearts and lives. For how could any man neglect to Preach the Word of God diligently, to Catechiſe the Children, viſit the Sick, reconcile Differences and all the reſt, with due care and fidelity, when he had it always in his mind; that *this is his buſineſs*, and that he promiſed to God before his people, that he would make this his buſineſs, and conſcientiouſly attend it? you cannot think of appearing before our Lord and Maſter, with any confidence, if you have not made good your word to him.

II. I am loath to ſuppoſe, that any who have ſworn Alleigeance to their preſent Majeſties, neglect to obſerve the *Monthly Faſts* appointed by their Authority, to implore Gods Bleſſing upon their Perſons, and the Proſperity of their Arms. But there being reports that ſome are guilty of ſuch ſcandalous Omiſſions, in ſeveral parts of this Kingdom; I beſeech you to take care that there be no ſuch complaint made to me of any in my Dioceſs. And let me not find that any omit the Uſe of that *Form of Prayer*, which is enjoyned on that occaſion: after which I will make a ſolemn enquiry and am commanded ſo to do.

III. I hope you received, two year a go, a *Letter of his Majeſties to the Biſhop of London*, ordred to be communicated to both Provinces of *Canterbury and York*. Wherein he requires all the Biſhops to keep a ſtrict watch over their Clergy; and more particularly to order them to preach frequently againſt thoſe ſins and Vices which are moſt prevailing in this Realm. As namely againſt *Blaſphemy, Swearing and Curſing*; againſt *Perjury*; againſt *Drunkenneſs*; and againſt *Profanation of the Lords day*. And in thoſe Lords-day's on which ſuch Sermons are preached, to read alſo to the people

people ſuch *Statutes* of this Realm, as are provided againſt that Vice, which is their Subject on that day: Which *Statutes* were printed together with that *Letter*, and ordred to be tranſmitted to every Pariſh in both *Provinces*. I moſt earneſtly entreat you to obſerve theſe injunctions: for they were not intended for that year only: but to continue till we ſaw the bleſſed effects of them in a hearty Reformation.

And for your better direction in this matter, let me deſire you to obſerve this method. On the *Sunday Sennight* before the Aſſizes, it will be moſt proper to read the Act of Parliament againſt PERJURY and to preach upon that Subject. On the *ſecond Sunday* in *May* it will be ſeaſonable to read the Act for the Obſervation of the LORD s-DAY, and exhort your Pariſhioners to the religious obſervation of it. On the *firſt Sunday* in *Advent* read the Act againſt BLASPHEMY, *Swearing and Curſing*, and preach againſt thoſe ſins. On the *Fourth Sunday* in *Lent*, againſt the ſins of ADULTERY and FORNICATION. It hath been intended that *Homilies* be provided for all theſe days: but till they be, let every one furniſh himſelf with Sermons upon theſe Heads, and continue this courſe from year to year.

IV. There have been ſuch foul practices, in *Clandeſtine Marriages* that they produced lately a *Bill* in Parliament: which if it had paſſed into an *Act* would have faln very heavily upon us all; and caſt no ſmall reproach upon us, for ſtanding in need of ſuch ſevere means for our Reformation. Which if we would avoid, let us obſerve the *Canons of the Church* exactly; and there will be no ſuch abuſes to be corrected, by any body but our ſelves alone. I reſolve, by God's Grace, to obſerve that part of them which concerns me; by proceeding againſt him, as a perſon ſuſpended for three years *ipſo facto*, who ſhall offend againſt the LXII. Canon. I hope you will as carefully obſerve your part, which is (as you may there read) not to marry any perſons without *asking in the Church*, or ſuch a *Licenſe* as the Law allows: and at no hour but between VIII. and XII. in the forenoon; nor in any *place* but in the Church or Chappel where one of the parties dwell; and not without conſent of *Parents* or *Guardians*, if the parties, to be married, be under the Age of one and Twenty years.

Let no Perſon, under the colour of any *peculiar Liberty or Priviledge*, belonging to the Church or Chappel, preſume to do otherwiſe: for the Penalty of Suſpenſion for *three* year, will notwithſtanding fall upon him, as he may learn by the next Canon LXIII. which I am reſolved to ſee put in Execution.

V. And

V. And now let me prevail with you to take ſome paines, where you find it neceſſary, with your *Church-wardens*, to convince them of the Obligation that is laid upon them, by a ſolemn Oath, to make a faithful Anſwer to my Enquiries, which ſhall be as few, as may be, that they may be the better able to give ſatisfaction to every one of them.

It would be a great comfort to me, as well as credit to this Church, to find the uſual Anſwer, true: But pray them to conſider what a guilt they bring upon their Souls, if they ſay, *All things are well*, and as they ought to be; when they know, in their Conſciences, that many things are quite otherwiſe. Beſeech them, as they love their own Souls, not to increaſe the Sins of the Nation, when we are endeavouring to reform them.

VI. Particularly, preſs them earneſtly, and aſſiſt them, to preſent to me all thoſe, who profeſs to live in the Communion of our Church, and are of Age, and yet neglect to receive the Holy Communion; at leaſt, 3 times in the Year, as by Law they are bound to do. For ſuch People not only *wrong their own Souls*, as the wiſe Man ſpeaks; but bring a great ſcandal upon our Church and Religion. For what other Chriſtians are there in the World, who ſuffer their Members to live without any ſolemn regard to their bleſſed Lord and Maſter, who dyed for them? As all thoſe do, who never commemorate his wonderful Love, by receiving the holy Sacrament of his Body and Blood. For the Lord's ſake, let this groſs neglect be amended.

And let me prevail with you, to put in practice the *firſt Rubrick* before the Communion Office; which directs all thoſe who intend to partake of the holy Communion, to *ſignifie their Names to the Curate, at leaſt ſome time the day before.* That he may both know, what quantity of Bread and Wine is neceſſary to be provided for Communicants; and alſo, diſcourſe with thoſe young Perſons, who may need inſtruction, and admoniſh thoſe who *are notorious and open evil livers*, or have any way injured their Neighbours (as the *next Rubrick* directs) to abſtain from the Lord's Table, till they have openly declared their ſincere purpoſe of amendment, and made ſatisfaction for the wrong they have done. This would be the more eaſie to perform; if as many as intend to Communicate, would be perſwaded (as I hope without much difficulty they may) to come to the publick Prayers, which I beſeech you never fail to have in the Church, on the *Wedneſdays*, *Fridays*, and *Saturdays*, before the

the Communion: however you may want a Congregation at other times. And in great and Market Towns, if not in others, I hope you may be able to keep up *monthly Communions*, as well as Prayers on all *Wedneſdays* and *Fridays*.

VII. There is another thing, in which both you and the Church-wardens are concerned; of which I beſeech you due care may be taken. Which is, to bring in to me or to the Arch-deacon at his next Viſitation, a *Terrier* of the *Glebe-lands*, *Meadows*, *Gardens*, *Orchards*, and all other things belonging to your Parſonage or Vicaridge: with an account of any *Cuſtoms of Tithings* which have been uſed among you: That ſo, the Maintenance provided for God's Miniſters, by our pious Anceſtors, may be preſerved.

It is ſo great a ſin and ſhame, to let thoſe Buildings which they erected for the Service of God, and for our Commodious Habitation, run to decay; that I muſt deſire you likewiſe to inform me truly, whether both the Church and Chancel of your Pariſh, and alſo your own Houſes, and out-Houſes, be in good repair. It makes my Heart ake, I aſſure you, to think that any of us ſhould ſo far degenerate from our worthy Progenitors, as not to uphold thoſe Fabricks in a good condition, which they raiſed from the Ground with great Coſt and Charges.

Let us all indeavour to redeem our ſelves from this infamy.

It would be very uſeful alſo, to have an inventory under your and the Church-wardens Hands, of all the Utenſils belonging to your Church: which I deſire you to deliver unto me, or unto my Arch-deacon, at his next Viſitation, to be kept in the Regiſters Office. Of this the Arch-biſhop hath required me to take an Account.

VIII. And now let me beſeech your conſcientious Care in ſome things which concern my ſelf, as well as you.

I. It is my duty to *Confirm* ſuch as are prepared for it; which that it may be done to Edification, and all diſorders and crowds may then be avoided; I pray you to take notice, that I will Confirm none, but ſuch whoſe Names ſhall be given to me in Writing, by you the Miniſters of the ſeveral Pariſhes, from whence they come: with a Certificate under your Hands, that you have examined them, and find them not only able to repeat the Words of the *Church Catechiſm*; but alſo ſenſible of the ſolemn Vow which was made in their Names at their Baptiſm; and deſirous to renew the ſame

ſame themſelves. Let it be your endeavour therefore to diſpoſe the young People of your Pariſh unto this: by repreſenting to them the Neceſſity, and the Benefit thereof.

And for the better performance of it, I deſign to Confirm as frequently, as I am able: not only in my Viſitation (when we have ſo much other Buſineſs, that I deſire thoſe only who are near, then to attend me) but at other times, and in ſuch Churches as I ſhall be adviſed to be moſt convenient: where thoſe in the Neighbourhood, who are fit to be Confirmed, may be appointed to reſort unto me.

II. Giving Holy Orders is another weighty Care of mine; about which I cannot be too ſolicitous: and wherein I muſt beg your aſſiſtance. And *Firſt*, I intreat you not to ſet your Hands to the Teſtimonial of any Perſon, but upon your own certain knowledge of his Life and Converſation, for the ſpace of 3 year next before, as the XXXIV. Canon requires. It would much conduce to reſtrain young Men from Vice, if they had no hope to gain a Teſtimonial of their *good life and behaviour*, from the eaſineſs or civility of their Neighbours, or any other means, but merely from their own known Vertue. Make a Conſcience of this; and it will go a great way to reform the Church. And *Secondly*, do not ſend any Perſon to me with *an empty Title*: For I will admit none to Orders, upon a Curacy; unleſs it be a competency, to be continued till he be otherways provided for. And *Lastly*, let me deſire you to ſignifie unto ſuch, as you find deſirous to be put into Holy Orders, that I expect they come to me, or certifie me of their intentions, a Month at leaſt before *Ordination Sunday*: That I may be able to give notice of it, to the Pariſh or Place where they live; that if they have any impediment to object, why they ſhould not be admitted, I may have timely information of it.

For there cannot be too much care taken, that the Flock of Chriſt be not committed into the Hands of bad Men; but ſuch may be ſet over them, as will *watch for their Souls, and fleeing youthful Lusts, will follow Righteouſneſs, Faith, Charity, Peace, with them that out of a pure heart call upon the Lord*, XIII. Hebr. 17. 2 Tim. II. 22.

Unto whoſe Grace and Bleſſing, I do moſt heartily commend you, and your Labours.

April 20. 1692.

SIMON ELIENSIS.

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